



# Water Safety Guidelines

*“Far too many people around the world know the pain of losing a loved one to drowning. Each year almost 360,000 people die from drowning—over 90 percent of them in low- and middle-income countries,” says Margaret Chan, former Director-General of the World Health Organization. “More than half of these deaths are among those under the age of 25, with children aged under five facing the greatest risk. Drowning is the third leading cause of death worldwide for those aged from five to 14. Despite these tragic facts, drowning prevention gets relatively little attention and few resources.”<sup>1</sup>*

As leaders, it is essential to always consider the safety of all those attending any event you organize near a lake, river, pond, or any body of water. While you may plan for a fun event where individuals can enjoy water activities, you also think about the possibility of accidents and even drowning. Prepare an action plan so that everyone can enjoy the day.

## Practicing Safety Near Bodies of Water

### Identify and Assess Danger

- Research pertinent information on the body of water (river, lake, ocean, well, ponds, etc.), such as wave types, water depth, currents, temperature, nearby waterfalls, and any history of drownings in the area. Watch out for rocks or underwater holes that could cause injury. Be mindful of creatures inhabiting the water and research whether they are harmful to humans.
- Check the surroundings for a clear approach to

the water. Pay attention to warning signs in the area; they are there for a reason! Verify whether the area is prone to flooding, as it increases the risk of accidents. Make sure there is no sewage discharged nearby.

### Do What You Can to Control and Minimize the Danger

- Inform the local authorities of your plans, if applicable. Depending on the location, some local authorities may require you to notify them of your plans. They may have requirements or limitations as to what activities are allowed in the water. They may have General/Public Liability coverage requirements or even provide a list of health and safety considerations for your activity. The real benefit is the knowledge gained from the local authorities about accidents that have happened in the past, and ideal ways to avoid those issues.

<sup>1</sup> Preventing drowning: an implementation guide. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2017. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.



- Consider the benefits of using a beach, pool or other location that has lifeguards, especially when your group includes kids. Having trained lifeguards who are familiar with the location may not only be essential in the event of an emergency but can also point out hazards to avoid.
- Have appropriate lifesaving/protective equipment with you at all times. It is necessary to update and restock your first aid kit beforehand. Additionally, have life jackets and lifesavers with rope in case someone falls in and is pulled away by water currents. Make sure all leaders and chaperones know how to use the equipment you bring.
- Provide training for leaders. This should include CPR and basic first aid certification. Training allows for proper emergency care to be executed in the event of an emergency. Make sure there is an adequate number of qualified people to supervise those in the water and the surrounding area.
- As part of your emergency plan, ensure that emergency numbers are displayed or readily accessible. If an emergency occurs alert the local emergency and rescue team as appropriate. Have emergency contact numbers for each participant readily available.

### Keep Monitoring

- *Has anything changed? Are there new risks to be assessed?* It is crucial to continue monitoring to ensure any potential risk is prevented or dealt with before it escalates.
- Use this as an opportunity to “test” the action plan. *Does it need improvement? Do any new actions need to be implemented?*
- As you create and promote a culture of risk management, these steps will become second nature. By implementing these steps, you are taking a proactive approach to risk management and helping to create a safe environment for all.



Make sure all leaders and chaperones know how to use the equipment you bring.



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